

February 3-9, 2019

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## Light for Our Darkness: The Epiphany Season

Sunday, February 3, 2019

Text: John 1:1-5

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*

These first verses in the Gospel of John provide a striking clarity of God's plan and purpose for his creation. Jesus was /is God in the fullest sense from the very beginning. And through Jesus we have eternal life which is Christ's gift to us and to all mankind as the "light of men" and the "light of the world."

In these dark and cold days of January and February of 2019, we experience a somewhat longer Epiphany Season and long for the light of Christ in our hearts and in our lives. Christ is the source of all spiritual illumination, dispelling the darkness and giving us hope and reassurance that we are children of God.

We pray: *Christ our Lord, be with us this week as we seek to understand your words and the many blessings and promises you bestow upon us. In all things, you are our hope and salvation for the church and the world. Amen*



Monday, February 4, 2019

Text: John 3:19-21

*This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.*

These verses follow the most quoted verse in the Bible, John 3:16 and perhaps the least quoted, John 3:17. The apostle John seeks to convey God's unfathomable love for the world in giving us his one and only Son (as a sacrifice for our sins). If only we believe in him, we shall not die but

have eternal life. John further clarifies that Jesus was not sent into the world to condemn the world but to save it through his sacrifice.

However, in these verses John makes it clear that God has no illusions about his creation and the nature of mankind. The good that we would do (if we can even recognize the truth) can only be accomplished through and with God.

We pray: *Most Gracious and Loving God, we can never be worthy of the love you have bestowed on us through the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. Be with us as we seek to share your love with others in our churches and communities. Amen*



**Tuesday, February 5, 2019**

Text: John 4:13-14

***Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.***

This verse comes from Jesus's interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well. It serves as a teaching moment for her as well as us. Consider her astonishment that this Jewish man had asked her to give him a drink of water and that he "knew" of her many husbands and current status. At Jesus' use of the term "living water" she immediately asks, "where can you get this living water?" If only it were that simple.

She continues to engage in a fairly complex theological discussion with Jesus, calling him a prophet and acknowledging that the Messiah (called Christ) will come and "he will explain everything to us." Then, Jesus declares, "I who speak to you am he." We know that she then returned to the town, telling all who would listen, and many Samaritans believed, came out to hear Jesus and convinced him to remain with them for 2 days.

For the Samaritan woman, this interaction signified her value as a child of God - and for us that we are all children of God (whatever our circumstance). God's grace through Christ gives us eternal life – living water that may become an outpouring of God's love to all.

We pray: *God of all peoples, as we share your Word through living water, let us be servants to all in need. Amen*



**Wednesday, February 6, 2019**

Text: John 6:35-37

**Then Jesus declared, *I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.***

In the Gospel of John, we encounter the “I am” statements of Jesus, all of which give us a clear strong image of Jesus. This is who or what I am, and this is what it means for you. Metaphorically, we understand that through following Jesus and believing that he is the Messiah, we will not hunger or thirst. However, if even the disciples who were with him daily failed to recognize his divinity, who are we to easily claim our allegiance? Throughout the Gospel, Jesus also continually declares that everything he is or does comes from God. “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.”

Personally, I find these statements very comforting and filled with hope. The hymn, “I Am the Bread of Life” [ELW #485] became a favorite of mine several years ago and was chosen for the funerals of both my parents. At my church back East, we sang it at each Ascension Eve Service. The refrain, “And I will raise you up, and I will raise you up, and I will raise you up on the last day,” truly captures the promise of eternal life.

We pray: *Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending your Son into the world to be with us, to teach us, to lead us to understanding, and to serve as a sacrifice for our sins. Amen.*



**Thursday, February 7, 2019**

Text: John 8:12

**When Jesus spoke again to the people he said, *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.***

Throughout the Gospel of John, we find the duality of light and darkness. As Jesus’ ministry progressed, he continues to teach and share who or what he is and what it means for the people. What could be more hopeful than this statement, “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” Jesus is the “light from God” – a beacon in a dark world that lights our way and shows us how to live in God’s light.

For many of us who live in the UP or northern Wisconsin, our night is very dark. In fast-paced urban environments, many of us seek the darkness of the sparsely populated wilderness, illuminated only by starlight and moonlight. While this environmental darkness may not be uncomfortable for us (given our modern conveniences), the darkness that Jesus is describing is quite different. It may be the darkness of grief, loss, addiction, poverty, hopelessness, broken relationships, loneliness, discrimination, persecution, etc. Only through the Light of Christ can we navigate all of the obstacles of our darkness.

We pray: *God of light, lead us out of the darkness of our own making, guide our steps, teach us to walk humbly to serve you and all those in need, following wherever the Spirit leads. Amen*



**Friday, February 8, 2019**

Text: John 10:14-16

***I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me --just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice and there will be one flock and one shepherd.***

In this portion of the Gospel, John conveys a deep mutual knowledge that would characterize the “good” shepherd with his sheep. The good shepherd would care for and know each of the sheep and if a predator attacks, may risk his life to protect the sheep. Within his community of followers, all of the people who heard Jesus make this claim, would certainly understand it. Christ’s imminent sacrifice and death are clear as is God’s plan and love for his Son and for us, “I lay down my life for the sheep.” Christ obediently chose to die.

The theme of the “other sheep” occurs here as well as in the passage of Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan women. Ultimately, the “other sheep” provide a glimpse of the future Church’s outreach to all people of the world to become the children of God.

We pray: *Christ our Shepherd, teach us to be good shepherds to all of your children. Through your Holy Spirit, enable us to care for the sick, feed and clothe those in need, give comfort to those in prison, stand with those who are persecuted, and speak Your truth each day. Amen*



**Saturday, February 9, 2019**

Text: John 11:25-26

***Jesus said to her (Martha), I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? “Yes Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”***

This passage occurs as Jesus and his disciples journey to Bethany, having heard of the illness of Lazarus. Upon their arrival they learned that he had died and been in the tomb for four days. Jesus was confronted by Martha (and later Mary) when he arrived. They both said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Jesus comforts Martha by saying, “Your brother will rise again.” With amazing understanding and faith, Martha says, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” The next verses are those above.

This is God's ultimate promise to us – no words could be more profound or offer more hope for our lives. When Jesus asks Martha if she believes this, her words are equally powerful and profound. “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.” In the final phrase, we again see God's plan – that his Son had to come into the world to save the world. Martha's words are also the 5<sup>th</sup> verse of the hymn, “I Am the Bread of Life.”

We pray: *Christ our Lord and Savior, we can only continue to pray, “Yes Lord, I believe.” Be with us as we seek to do your will, serve others as you continue to care for us, and be your light in the world. Amen.*

